

**REMARKS BY PRESIDENT KEOHANE**  
**AT THE GRAND OPENING OF THE SAINT JAMES BAPTIST CHURCH**  
**AND FAMILY LIFE CENTER IN WALLTOWN**

**January 23, 2000**

What a splendid day this is! Reverend Brooks, I think you may know that I'm a preacher's kid. My father was a Presbyterian minister. I spent many hours of my childhood in warm settings such as this where the church was the center of community life, where children felt safe, where people came together over potluck dinners, and where everyone had a sense of pride in themselves and the community the church served. So this really is a kind of homecoming. I truly am delighted to be here.

What a magnificent youth choir we've heard today! I hope that quite a few of you will think about coming to Duke as students someday. We look forward to welcoming you.

Another reason this is a special day for me personally is because my son and his family live in Walltown; Jonathan teaches at the NC School of Science and Math, and thus we know first hand how important it is to support those who work to strengthen this community, and we share your delight in the renaissance of Walltown.

Thus, speaking both for myself and as president of Duke, I want you to know how pleased I and so many others at the university, including our trustees, are by the progress of Walltown. I was pleased to hear Pastor Brooks and others refer to the *partnerships* that have made today possible. Indeed, the concept of partnership is at the heart of Duke's Neighborhood Partnership Initiative from which many of the collaborations in support of the revitalization of Walltown and the creation of this marvelous community center have come. The people of Saint James, the people of Walltown Neighborhood Ministries, of the Self-Help Credit Union, of the Durham and Orange County Junior League, of The Duke Endowment, of Habitat for Humanity, of the City of Durham, and yes, the people at Duke and its Divinity School who have made today possible. We are all partners in this exciting adventure. But, above all, it's the people of Walltown itself who have made today possible. And I'm delighted that Duke has been able to play a role in supporting the grassroots initiatives that have emerged from this community that this wonderful facility represents. I'm proud of the work you've all done. I'm also touched and inspired by it. This is an example of what is best about Durham, of what can happen when our visions grow together.

Fancy words such as "community development, crime reduction, affordable housing, and neighborhood stabilization" -- as important as they are -- sound empty until we associate them with real people, until we look each other in the eye and say "I'm glad you're here; I'm glad we're here together." This is particularly so for the children of our community. There is no investment of time and energy and money more worthwhile than that we make in our children. Among the Ganda people of Africa, they say a garden without young trees will soon come to an end. That is a wonderful thought. Together, at Saint James and in other new partnership initiatives in Walltown, we are cultivating our young trees with love.

I have learned recently of some of the history between Walltown and Duke, and for those who may not know of it, I thought I'd take a few minutes to tell you about it. This 1945 landmark that was the Walltown Elementary School itself is an emblem of the larger history of this community. Its renovation continues a long tradition of partnering between the university and its home town, a tradition that in some ways extends back for nearly 150

years. George Wall, the founder of Walltown, was born into slavery in Randolph County in 1856 where the Methodist minister, Braxton Craven, later discovered him and invited him to become, at age 14, custodian of Trinity College, of which Craven was president. George Wall went on to become friends with John F. Crowell, Craven's successor as president at Trinity College, who was about seven years older than he. According to a letter that former President Crowell wrote from his retirement home to the Duke Alumni Register after it had announced Mr. Wall's death in 1930, the two families shared each other's joy at the birth of a baby girl whom George brought over for a visit at the president's house. This baby must have been either the great-grandmother or great-great-aunt of current Walltown resident and Saint James Baptist Church member Dawn Alston!

George Wall helped Trinity College move to Durham in 1892, and continuing on with President Kilgo and later with President William Preston Few, he helped transform little Trinity, which had all of 180 students in the year of its move, into Duke University in 1924. He was a linchpin for more than 60 years in the operations of what is now Duke University. His son, George Frank Wall, continued that tradition of service into the administration of Duke President Robert Flowers, bequeathing the university \$100 for undergraduate scholarships in 1946 and naming Flowers as his executor. \$100 was a lot of money in 1946.

As we look to the future, it is important to be reminded of the traditions and past ways in which Duke and George Wall's creation of Walltown have grown with each other. Duke is honored by this history of partnership of which today's celebration is only the latest chapter. As in the past, it is the people of Durham, of Duke, and of Walltown who have done this. With the past uniting us, with our hopes firmly rooted in the present, and with our vision of a loving and mutually supportive future, let us celebrate our partnership as neighbors, and let us build on the contributions Saint James and her many partners are making so that Walltown can be an even more vibrant community for future generations of flourishing young folks.

Thank you again, and God bless.